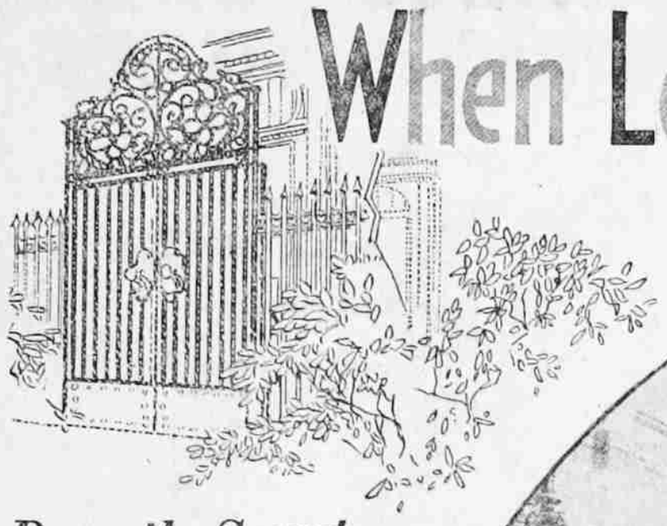
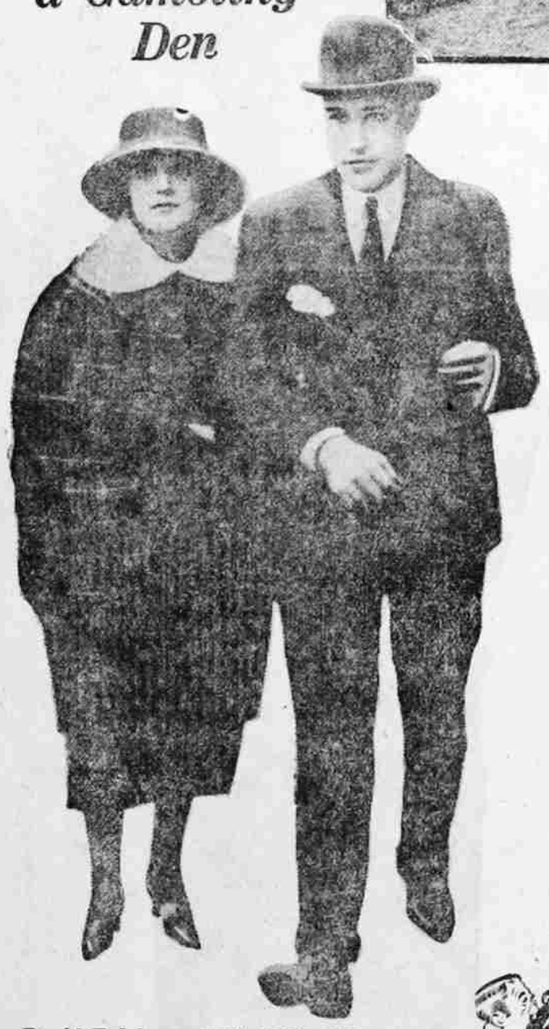
When London's Most Mysterious Mansion Was Raided



Down the Secret Passage the Bobbies Chopped Their Way and Revealed That the Home of Unsuspecting Viscount Galway Was Converted Into a Gambling Den

The Stately Banquet Hall in the Viscount's London Mansion Through Which the Raiding Bobbies Charged en Masse.

Baron Monckton Seventh Viscount of Galway.



David Falcke and His Wife, Who Posed as a Society Leader, Arriving at Marlborough Police Station After the Sensational Raid.

LONDON.

THE most historic homes in London, including stately old mansions of the nobility, with secret passages and underground chambers dating back to the romantic era when poniard and poison cup flourished with love and murder in circles of the gentry, to-day are being used as secret gambling clubs by British society.

It is a far cry from gallants in doublet and hose to the sleek croupier of 1922 and the modern Piccadilly "bounder," but the sudden police raid on the town house of Viscount Galway, one of Great Britain's most distinguished peers, has turned back the pages of history two hundred years.

For in this hoary mansion, outwardly so respectable, agents from Scotland Yard unearthed an amazing situation. Chopping down massive doors blackened and scarred by time, they discovered a secret corridor paved with worn flagging and leading by a tortuous spiral staircase to a subterranean room, apparently a dungeon.

But here, where swashbuckling Jacobites may have once plotted to place a Stuart king on England's throne, was the complete equipment for a miniature Monte Carlo. Roulette wheels and baccarat tables in place of sword and dagger; men and women feverishly watching the spin of a wheel instead of nobles duelling by candlelight; upstairs, in lieu of wandering minstrels, a jazz band to furnish the camouflage of a private dance—this was the strange change time had wrought.

The raid and its remarkable revelation was as much of a surprise to the Viscount as it was to the police. George Edmund Milnes Monckton-Arundell, C. B., seventh Viscount of Galway, former aide-de-camp to Queen Victoria, had owned his handsome Mayfair home for years without suspecting its mysterious annex. Going to the Riviera for golf, he had authorized his agents to lease the house for six months.

A short time after the new tenants moved in the police got a tip from an Oxford undergraduate, who confessed to his shocked father, one of Viscount Galway's best friends, that he had thrown away his monthly allowance in a West End gambling house catering almost exclusively to youthful customers, many of them flappers of fifteen.

That night two inspectors from Scotland Yard lingered in the shadow of the elm trees across the street from 48, Portland Place. In an area-way not a pebble's toss away six bobbies waited with nightsticks and axes.

It was after midnight before the curbstone cluster of taxicabs, plus one or two limousines and several snappy little racing cars, told the detectives the time was ripe. A silent signal to the bluecoats and, before any possible lookout could raise the alarm, the raiders had dashed across the street and up the stone steps of Viscount Galway's stately mansion.

Their progress was barred by an iron portcullis—tough meat for police axes. Impatiently the chief inspector rang a long peal on the doorbell and hammered at the gate. Only silence answered him until, from the shuttered second story, suddenly jingled the music of a jazz band. The next moment the double door creaked open, revealing the haughty face of a butler.

Sleuths and bobbies bowled him over. Through a second door they sped, across the polished elegance of the main reception hall and up the grand staircase, with its golden balustrade, its steps of Carrara marble and the Grecian urns on each pillar.

The scene that greeted them at the top was innocence itself. A dozen or more couples pirouetted about the big ballroom in the latest variation of the fox trot. In one of the window seats, chatting animatedly, sat a cutie not many years out of kindergarten and a lad whose chubby cheeks and Eton collar proclaimed his age—or lack of it. Several "stags," none of them far from the fawn age, loafed against the wall, puffing precocious cigarettes. And, mincing toward the intruders from the direction of the jazz orchestra, came an older man, whose face wore an expression of polite but disapproving inquiry. He was accompanied by a young woman in dazzling evening costume. Dancing master and chaperone they looked to a "T."

For a moment the chief inspector was nonplussed. But he had been told to expect camouflage of this sort, and a quick glance when he first entered had detected certain suspicious signs, not the least of which was the air of forced nonchalance on the part of the "stags."

Over the dignified protests of the "hosts" the raiders began a search. Nothing in the ballroom but palpitating flappers and their squires. Nothing in the rooms opening out from it but the fine old furniture, ancestral portraits, antiques and heirlooms of Viscount Galway.

It was on one of the antiques that the chief inspector's eye finally rested and stopped—a huge Chinese screen painted in gold and crimson dragons, reaching from floor almost to the ceiling at one end of the ballroom.

For the second time the inspector stepped behind it and examined the dark cozy corner it concealed. And for the first time, hidden behind a branching palm, he saw a door of black mahogany.

"The key!" demanded the inspector.

"That room is one Viscount Galway left locked; we haven't the key," he was told.

"Axes, men," was the inspector's answer to this.

In a few seconds, under the splintering crash of the axes in the hands of the six sturdy bobbies, Viscount Galway's fine mahogany door was in ruins. Beyond stretched blackness—not a room at all, but a narrow passageway of stone flags that echoed hollowly under the heels of the officers, just as it may have echoed two hundred years before to the boots of Stuart hotspurs.

A second door, massive as the first, fell beneath the axes and revealed a spiral staircase winding downward at the very back of the house. Inspectors and bobbies were not halfway in the descent when the roar of a motor outside announced that the birds had flown. They had to content themselves with the nest. And a gilded nest they found it.

The secret staircase they discovered ended in a subterranean chamber which, so old was the house, might have been built as a refuge for Royalist plotters in the early eighteenth century. Of the many changes the ancient mansion experienced in years of repairing and rebuilding, none was stranger than the one that came to it when Viscount Galway decided to go pleasuring to the Riviera.

Baccarat tables, roulette wheels, poker chips, shoes, rakes, decks of cards, ivory counters—all the paraphernalia of a gambling establishment as complete, on a minor scale, as the Deauville Casino offers—were scattered about the room. One table was overturned. Chips were on the floor where they had fallen. Several bottles of champagne, a smashed wine glass and a girl's silver slipper at the foot of the staircase testified to the hasty departure of the players.

Besides the exit by the secret staircase, a trapdoor in the floor of the chamber gave onto still another subterranean corridor leading to the old-fashioned coach-house in the back yard. If any one had remained in [illegible] when the raid was made he had escaped that way to a waiting automobile, the police decided.

They arrested "host" and "hostess." The former, David Falcke, was identified as "one of the most inveterate gamesters and gaming-house keepers in London." The latter, Mrs. Marjory Beryl Brisley, fashionably gowned and beautiful, had leased the Galway mansion from the Viscount's agents by posing as a society leader. Falcke was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and Mrs. Brisley was fined £300 or two months' imprisonment.

But the sensation caused by the raid did not stop there. Falcke, by shouldering all responsibility for the gambling paraphernalia, secured the release of his rich young customers. They were not even taken in charge by the officers, but—in a gust of giggles, tears and anxious predictions of what the next day would bring—motored off into the night. Since then young Oxford and flapper Mayfair have been in a flurry of fear as gossip brought first one name and then another to parental ears.

Meantime the raid set many wheels in motion. Falcke was declared at his trial to be conducting not less than six such gambling houses in the West End; the prosecution charged him with being a member of an international syndicate that financed these gilded dens and, where reckless young bloods did not patronize them, catered particularly to wealthy American tourists lured thither from as far away as Paris and Rome. In case after case, it was asserted, the vacant home of a peer had been leased, a number of them having the same sort of secret passages and chambers as Viscount Galway's.

Even now Scotland Yard is said to be planning a series of raids which may unearth, in the halls where the Jacobites once toasted blithely the divine right of kings, feverish groups of men and women panting over roulette and baccarat, while above them a blind is furnished by the blare and beat of jazz.